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Evidence of me

Evidence of *me*

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The Pittsburgh Project researchers focused on defining the functional requirements for recordkeeping in a corporate context, and developing means to satisfy them through a blend of policy, system design and implementation strategies that would enable compliance with emerging standards for 'business acceptable communications' (records). Part of their brief, particularly associated with the research of Wendy Duff, has been to discover the 'literary warrant' for the functional requirements — specifically to determine whether the credibility of particular functional requirements can be established by reference to authoritative sources such as the law, and the standards and best practices of related professionals, for example lawyers, auditors and information technologists, as codified in their literature.¹ This article ex-

plores the nature of personal recordkeeping and broad social mandates for its role in witnessing to individual lives, and constituting part of society's collective memory and cultural identity. It posits that social mandates for personal recordkeeping may be found in sociology and in creative and reflective writing, and provides some examples of how the 'urge to witness', the 'instinct to account for ourselves', the need to leave behind 'the comforting marker-buoys and trail-signs of stories', are represented there. It also considers a range of personal recordkeeping behaviours and the role archivists play in carrying a personal archive beyond the boundaries of an individual life and into the collective archives — how evidence of *me* becomes evidence of *us*.

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A kind of witnessing...

Keep them, burn them — they are evidence of *me*. (Matthew Pearce, nineteenth century surveyor and amateur geologist, referring to his notebooks, in Graham Swift's *Ever after*, Picador, London, 1992, p52.)²

They spent long hours together over little meals she prepared and talked about life and love and literature, assuring each other how wise they were. Now that he's moved back to Europe he writes her frequent letters, making her a witness to his life... (Edmund White, 'Straight

women, gay men' (1991) in *The burning library: writings on art, politics and sexuality 1969-1993*, Picador, London, 1995, p.313.)

RECORD KEEPING is a 'kind of witnessing'. On a personal level it is a way of evidencing and memorialising our lives — our existence, our activities and experiences, our relationships with others, our identity, our 'place' in the world. Some interesting insights into personal recordkeeping as a 'kind of witnessing' are provided in *Highways to a war* by Christopher Koch (Heinemann, Port Melbourne, 1995). This is the story of Mike Langford, a fictional Australian war photographer modelled on real life cameraman Neil Davis.³ In Koch's novel, Langford disappears inside Cambodia after its fall to the Khmer Rouge. The story explores Langford's personal journey to war, and is told through his audio diary, work notebooks, photographs and his friends, all 'witnesses' to his life.

Those of us who, like Mike Langford, accumulate our personal records over time are engaged in the process of forming a personal archive. The functionality of a personal archive, its capacity to witness to a life, is dependent on how systematically we go about the business of creating our records as documents, capturing them as records (that is, ordering them in relation to each other and 'placing' them in the context of related activities), and keeping and discarding them over time (that is, organising them to function as long-term memory of significant activities and relationships). Archivists, in particular collecting archivists, are in part in the business of ensuring that a personal archive considered to be of value to society at large is incorporated into the collective archives of the society, and thus constitutes an accessible part of that society's

memory, its experiential knowledge and cultural identity — evidence of us.

What characterises the recordkeeping behaviour of individuals and what factors condition that behaviour? What range of 'personal recordkeeping cultures' can be identified?

At one extreme there are those like the character Ann-Clare in the Australian novel *The grass sister* by Gillian Mears (Knopf, Sydney, 1995). Seven years after Ann-Clare's disappearance in Africa, Ann-Clare's sister sets out on a search, the object of which is to come to know her sister, to understand their relationship, and so to come to terms with Ann-Clare's death:

And I find in Ann-Clare's things almost every letter she must have ever received and carbons of her own replies. (p62)

There are 'outwards and inwards files', together with photographs and slides which document the most intimate details of Ann-Clare's life and relationships. In Ann-Clare we have an intriguingly disturbing portrait of an obsessive recordkeeper. In sharp contrast there are those individuals who essentially operate in 'remembrancer' mode. Patrick White is a quintessential example of such a 'recordkeeper':

He had no diaries to work from, he had never kept letters, nor did he make copies of the letters he wrote. He had only his memory, but he remembered everything. (David Marr, referring to the writing of White's memoir, *Flaws in the glass*, in *Patrick White: a life*, Vintage, Sydney, 1992, p597.)

And in between the Ann-Clares and the Patrick Whites, there are all shades of personal recordkeeping behaviour.

Archivists can analyse what is happening in personal recordkeeping in much the same way as they analyse corporate recordkeeping. Just as they can identify

significant business functions and activities and specify what records are captured as evidence of those activities, so they can analyse socially assigned roles and related activities and draw conclusions about what records individuals in their personal capacity capture as evidence of these roles and activities — 'evidence of me'. They can also define individuals in terms of their relationships with others — using words that imply roles or relationships, remembering James Baldwin saying to a white audience: 'You have to call *me* black, that's what defines *you* as white'. Spouse, lover, longtime companion, partner, parent, sibling, child, grandchild, godparent, friend, employee, taxpayer, citizen, subscriber, member of a club, professional society or church, student, ratepayer, flatmate, customer, ancestor, descendant, *me*, all these words place individuals in relation to others and in society. Such relationships carry with them socially conditioned ways of behaving and interacting that extend also to recordkeeping behaviour.

What records of the activities associated with these various roles do individuals want or need to capture, and in what documentary form? Why do they need to capture them? How long do they need to keep them and why? Why do some individuals accumulate their records over time in ways that enable the formation of a personal archive? As is the case with corporate recordkeeping, in relation to personal recordkeeping, such questions can be addressed with reference to issues of competencies and related rights, obligations, responsibilities, the need to continue to function effectively in a particular role, or fundamental needs relating to a sense of self, identity, a 'place' in the world. Where can we look for articulations of the role of recordkeeping in evidencing and memorialising a life?

One place to begin might be in the works of sociologists. In his exploration of self identity and modernity, for example, Anthony Giddens speaks of the 'narrative of the self':

The existential question of self-identity is bound up with the fragile nature of the biography which the individual 'supplies' about herself. A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor — important though this is — in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to *keep a particular narrative going*. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self (p54).⁴

Although a 'narrative of the self' may never be written down, recordkeeping, in particular keeping a journal, can be one way of 'keeping a particular narrative going'. Indeed keeping a journal has become a recommended form of self-therapy, a way of 'sustaining an integrated sense of self' (p76). Giddens also refers to the 'process of mutual disclosure' associated with intimate relationships in the modern age. One dimension of this process can be the writing and keeping of letters.

Works of creative and reflective writing also address fundamental issues about the nature and role of records as 'evidence of me' — why make records, why keep records, why burn them? — and explore personal recordkeeping behaviour.

Keep them...

Ever after (Picador, London, 1992) is a work of fiction, a novel by Graham Swift. Set in the present and the past, *Ever after* tells two parallel stories, one Bill Unwin's first person account of a contemporary life, the other a story pieced together by Bill from the notebooks of his

Victorian ancestor, Matthew Pearce. Among other things *Ever after* explores why people make and keep records.

By contrast, and insofar as such categories are still meaningful, *The silent woman* (Picador, London, 1994) is a work of non-fiction, written by Janet Malcolm as a 'meditation on the problem of biography', taking the biographies of Sylvia Plath, the American poet who committed suicide in 1963, after her husband, British poet Ted Hughes, had left her for another woman, as her case study. Malcolm deconstructs the various biographies of Plath, which divide into those sympathetic to Plath and those sympathetic to Hughes. She also deconstructs their sources — Plath's poems, novel, short stories, journals and letters, and Hughes' letters, as well as the letters, interview accounts and memoirs of their family and friends. In so doing she weaves her own story of Plath's life and death, addressing in the telling fundamental questions about why people make and keep records, what they record, the documentary forms they choose, and their meaning to future readers:

I was being made privy to a lovers' quarrel. The letters rang with accusations, re-criminations, resentment, grievances, threats, insults, shows of pitiableness, rage, petulance, contempt, injured pride — the whole repertoire of bad feeling that people who have got under each other's skin trot out and fling at each other like buckets of filthy water... Letters are the fixative of experience. Time erodes feeling. Time creates indifference. Letters prove to us that we once cared. *They are the fossils of feeling* (p110 — my italics).

Ever after is in part the story of Matthew, the surveyor and amateur archaeologist/geologist, a clockmaker's son from Cornwall born into a pre-Darwinian world when people 'still had souls'. Matthew married the daughter of a rector in a vil-

lage in Devon, had children and 'almost lived happily ever after':

Then one day Matthew told the vicar that he no longer believed in God. Result: scandal, divorce... (p.47).

For Matthew had fallen a prey to religious doubt as he struggled to come to terms with the 'evidence' of the past, dating from the moment he describes as 'the moment of my unbelief. The beginning of my make-belief...', when he stands on the site of a dig in Dorset and sees the bones of an ichthyosaur — 'the skull of a beast that must have lived, so certain theories would have held, unimaginably longer ago than... Scripture allowed for...' (p101). Struggling too to come to terms with the death of his child, as recorded in his notebooks, which span the six-year period from that death to the end of his marriage in 1860 (the year after Darwin published *The origin of the species*) and chronicle his loss of faith. Preserved for posterity they become testimony to how 'ideas that shook the world' were played out in the microcosm of a private life. In 1869 Matthew sails for Australia, leaving behind his notebooks for his ex-wife, with these words:

...what you will do with them — ignore them, keep or destroy them — will not be for me to know. Keep them, burn them — they are evidence of me (p51-52).

Why did Matthew write the notebooks? Why did he keep them? Why didn't his ex-wife burn them?

These note-keepers. This jotting urge. This need to set it down... Is it possible that in the midst of his torment of soul (his what?) one tiny corner of Matthew's eye was aimed at posterity? Some reader hereafter. Some unknown accretion... A small plea, after all, for non-extinction. A life, after all, beyond life. (p207).

And Elizabeth? She kept the letter, she kept the notebooks. She loved him still (p221).

Why did Plath write poems, journals and letters? What aspects of her life do they represent? Why did others — her husband, her mother, her friends — keep and publish her records and their records of their relationship with her? Hughes, for example, kept and published her journals, but destroyed the two which recorded the months leading up to her death. Her mother kept and eventually published Plath's letters to her. Other friends kept her letters and deposited them with manuscript collections all over the world. Hughes believes that Plath's 'true self' is only recorded in her final poems, which after her death have established her reputation as a poet and which have posthumously taken on another meaning, acquired from the nature of that death. For him her earlier poems, novel, short stories and letters represent her 'false selves', while her journals record her 'day to day struggle with her warring selves' (p4). Significantly in light of this interpretation, Hughes destroyed her record of the 'day to day struggle' in the journals which paralleled the writing of the final poems.

Turning away from Hughes' 'warring selves' view, Janet Malcolm speaks rather of 'the many voices in which the dead girl spoke — the voices of the journals, of her letters, of *The bell jar*, of the short stories, of the earlier poems, of the Ariel poems — [which] mocked the whole idea of biographical narrative' (p17). She contrasts the 'sharper and darker' voice of the journal writer, and its extraordinary intimacy, with the voice of the letter-home writer (p38-9), and the persona behind the 'private and unpremeditated' letters sent in the secure knowledge that they were for a mother's uncritical [sic!] eyes alone' with the persona behind the poems, 'the persona by which Plath wished to be represented and remembered' (p.34). Here we

are offered insights into not only how archival documents (the journals and letters) provide 'evidence of me', but also into how the kind of evidence that archival documents capture is related to the evidence from other kinds of documents — how the different documentary genres communicate different aspects of a life, speaking to us in different voices.

Burn them

For much of his life, Patrick White was the archetype of a destroyer of records:

It is dreadful to think ...that one's letters still exist. I am always burning and burning, and must go out tomorrow to the incinerator with a wartime diary I discovered at the back of the wardrobe the other day. (From a letter to his American publisher, Ben Huebsch, in 1957, quoted in David Marr, *Patrick White: a life*, p323.)

His manuscripts too were routinely consigned to the flames:

I stood at the fire feeding the manuscripts in, bundle by bundle, thinking perhaps I could keep out just this little bundle. It was all handwritten and in those days Patrick had a most beautiful hand, it was very easy to read. But I couldn't because I had promised to burn them. And if I make a promise, I must keep it. (Manoly Lascaris referring to the burning of the manuscripts of *The tree of man* and *Voss*, quoted in *Patrick White: a life*, p441. Lascaris, also at White's request but with much regret, burnt all White's letters to him.)

The destruction of records and the psychology of the destroyer were also recurring themes in White's fiction:

It doesn't do to keep old letters... It's morbid. You start reading back, and forget that you have moved on. (*The tree of man*, p213, quoted in *Patrick White: a life*, p441.)

He began to throw his papers by handfuls, or would hold one down with his

slipped foot, when the wind threatened to carry too far, with his slipped foot from which the blue veins and smoke wreathed upward.

It was both a sowing and a scattering of seed. When he had finished he felt lighter, but always had been, he suspected while walking away.

Now at least he was free of practically everything (*The solid mandala*, p213, quoted in *Patrick White: a life*, p442.)⁵

When the National Library of Australia sought to collect White's papers in 1977, it met with this response:

My MSS are destroyed as soon as the books are printed. I put very little into notebooks, don't keep my friends' letters as I urge them not to keep mine, and anything unfinished when I die is to be burnt. The final versions of my books are what I want people to see and if there is anything of importance to me, it will be in those. (Patrick White, *Letters*, edited by David Marr, Random House, Sydney, 1994, p492.)

Of course, many of White's letters survived in the records of those of his correspondents who did not comply with his requests to destroy them. An interesting insight into the psychology, or in some cases the economics, of collecting is gleaned from Marr's observation that after the publication of *The tree of man*, a much higher percentage of White's letters survive:

White was now a man whose letters were kept. (*Letters*, p107.)

Towards the end of his life, a significant shift occurred in White's thinking on recordkeeping. In earlier days, according to Marr, 'his privacy mattered most'. Moreover, his prodigious memory meant that, unlike those of us with poor memories, he did not need to use recordkeeping as individual memory. His 'narrative of the self' was maintained through remembrancing and in the literary forms

of his novels and plays. Yet, for White too, there eventually came a time when 'privacy was no longer the issue' and carrying forward evidence of his life beyond his own lifetime was what 'mattered most'. So he agreed to Marr's request for cooperation in the writing of his biography, started encouraging his correspondents to make his letters accessible to Marr (who describes in *Patrick White: a life* [p647] how White's cousin Peggy Garland 'showed me what this book might be' when 'she put into my hands the first, thrilling bundle of his letters'), and finally authorised Marr to collect and publish them. Like Plath's letters, the originals of White's are now to be found amongst the records of his personal and business correspondents deposited in archives and libraries all over the world.

It is interesting to note that one of the great strengths of David Marr's biography of White, which focuses on what made him a writer and 'where his writing came from', lies in the way he constantly filters the information gleaned from a White letter — about his activities, his writings, his thoughts, feelings and his relationships with others — through the nature of the particular relationship between White and the recipient of that letter, and establishes links between the different ways in which White's letters and his literary works evidence White's identity. Different aspects of White's personality are disclosed to his many and various correspondents depending on the nature and degree of intimacy of the relationship they shared, although he shared the most revealing insights into his multifaceted personality with his readers through the portrayal of the many characters in his novels which represent aspects of himself.

Consideration of the insights provided in the creative and reflective writings ref-

erenced above suggests that archivists may benefit from exploring a range of issues in greater depth. For example, how do other types of documents function as evidence, and what is it that they evidence? Could further reflection on the way in which personal letters evidence relationships enrich our understandings of the multifaceted nature of provenance and perhaps lead archivists to speculate, as has Chris Hurley, that its locus might not lie after all with individuals or corporate bodies, but in the relationships between them. Personal letters may inform us *about* many aspects of an individual's life, but they evidence first and foremost the relationship and interactions between the writer and the recipient. The context for interpreting the information they contain is that relationship, that interaction. The above discussion also suggests that a better understanding is needed of the way that letters function as documents (information) and as records (evidence of the relationship between the parties involved) and how their informational value is dependent on their evidential value — and the implications of that for other forms of document. In these areas archivists' understanding of the quality of recordness and the significance of context in relation to archival documents should be able to contribute to the understandings of others whose primary concern may be with the way that documents function as information or with interpreting other types of evidence.

The story-telling animal

Christopher Koch's *Highways to war*, referenced earlier, captures for us the power of the still photograph to document or freeze the moment. In documenting the war in Vietnam and later in Cambodia, Langford photographs the action in situations of extreme risk, as did real life coun-

terparts cameraman Neil Davis and photojournalist Don McCullin, their careers devoted to bearing 'witness to catastrophic events'⁶:

They were great pictures. He was born to do stills work; he always wanted to freeze the moment...

He caught American GIs on the rim of death, as he did with the AVRN troops; he got the expressions on their faces in those moments. They were the pictures you didn't forget... (p163-4).

Koch's novel is in some ways a highly idealised account, but its portrayal of the role of photographer as witness to the moment is reflected again and again in other writings on photography. As another real life photojournalist, Alfred Eisenstaedt, once wrote:

The photographer's job is to find and catch the storytelling moment.

In another of his works of fiction, *Waterland* (Picador, London, 1992, p62), Graham Swift explores how the fundamental urge to tell the story, the instinct to account for ourselves, defines what it is to be human. Thus Swift's hero, referring to the stories his mother told him to allay his fears of the dark:

My earliest acquaintance with history was thus, in a form issuing from my mother's lips, inseparable from her other bedtime make-believe: how Alfred burnt the cakes, how Canute commanded the waves, how King Charles hid in an oak tree — as if history were a pleasing invention. And even as a schoolboy, when introduced to history as an object of study, when nursing indeed an unfledged lifetime's passion, it was still the fabulous aura of history that lured me, and I believed, perhaps like you, that history was a myth. Until a series of encounters with the Here and Now, gripping me by the arm, slapping my face and telling me to take a good look at the mess I was in, informed me that history was no inven-

tion but indeed existed — and I had become part of it.

Swift provides an insight into the way Giddens' 'narrative of the self' might merge into the narrative of the tribe — and eventually contribute to the yarn that is history itself:

So I shouldered my Subject. So I began to look into history — not only the well-thumbed history of the wide world but also, indeed with particular zeal, the history of my Fenland forbears. So I began to demand of history an Explanation. Only to uncover in this dedicated search more mysteries, more fantasticalities, more wonders and grounds for astonishment than I started with; only to conclude forty years later — notwithstanding a devotion to the usefulness, to the educative power of my chosen discipline — that history is a yarn. And can I deny that what I wanted all along was not some golden nugget that history would at last yield up, but History itself: the Grand Narrative, the filler of vacuums, the dispeller of fears of the dark?

Swift goes on to link human identity to the 'capacity to keep the narrative going':

Children, only animals live entirely in the Here and Now. Only nature knows neither memory nor history. But man — let me offer you a definition — is the story-telling animal. Wherever he goes he wants to leave behind not a chaotic wake, not an empty space, but the comforting marker-buoys and trail-signs of stories. He has to go on telling stories, he has to keep on making them up. As long as there's a story, it's all right.

Like Giddens, Swift confronts us with the broad sweep of his ideas — recordkeeping we are reminded is but one kind of witnessing, one of the processes that contributes to keeping the narrative going, but nevertheless it is linked inextricably to fundamental issues of individual and cultural identity.

Bearing witness to the cultural moment

Moving beyond consideration of the needs of an individual to evidence and memorialise a life, to leave behind 'the comforting marker-buoys and trail signs of stories', and the patterns of personal recordkeeping behaviour, archivists can look at what values the personal archive might have for other people. They can think about how society has constructed systems and regimes to carry personal records forward through time and space in ways which retain their qualities as 'evidence of me'. A study of the personal diary might be very revealing in this regard. It represents both a documentary form and a type of recordkeeping system, a system that is so institutionalised in our society that individuals can readily follow its 'rules' and 'protocols', implementing the recordkeeping processes associated with keeping a diary in ways which support its transactionality, evidentiality and quality as memory.⁷ Research into the phenomenon of the collecting archives as an example of an institutionalised way of preserving a society's memory — and of how effectively it functions as a regime for carrying a personal archive beyond the boundaries of an individual life, of how well it fulfils its role of transforming 'evidence of me' into evidence of us — would also be of value.

In Edmund White's writings there is a fine sense of the role of personal recordkeeping linked to issues of cultural identity and memory, and to the 'instinct to witness':

Maybe it's tactless or irrelevant to critical evaluation to consider an artist, writer, dealer or curator in the light of his death. Yet the urge to memorialize the dead, to honour their lives, is a press-

ing instinct. Ross Bleckner's paintings with titles such as *Hospital Room*, *Memoriam*, and *8,122+ As of January 1986* commemorate those who have died of AIDS and incorporate trophies, banners, flowers and gates — public images.

There is an equally strong urge to record one's own past — one's own life — before it vanishes. I suppose everyone both believes and chooses to ignore that each detail of our behaviour is inscribed in the arbitrariness of history. Which culture, which moment we live in determines how we have sex, go mad, marry, die, and worship, even how we say Ail instead of Ouch! when we're pinched... For gay men this force of history has been made to come clean; it's been stripped of its natural look. The very rapidity of change has laid bare the clanking machinery of history. To have been oppressed in the 1950s, freed in the 1960s, exalted in the 1970s and wiped out in the 1980s is a quick itinerary for a whole culture to follow. For we are witnessing not just the death of individuals but a menace to an entire culture. All the more reason to bear witness to the cultural moment. ('Esthetics and Loss' (1987) in *The burning library*, p215.)

Conversely, it is worth thinking about the significance that bearing witness to the cultural moment has for questions of individual identity. The potent way in which recordkeeping as cultural memory evidences the past in ways which link significantly to the here and now of individual lives was illustrated recently in the reaction in Australia to an exhibition put together by Australian Archives, *Between two worlds*. The records in that exhibition bear witness to a cruel and shameful policy that separated Koori children, particularly those labelled 'half-castes', from their families and inflicted lifelong suffering. The effect of this witnessing on younger Kooris whose families had in the past been touched by this policy was epitomised by the reaction of Michael Long, who opened the exhibition. He had been

vaguely aware of the policy and its legacy, but as he viewed the exhibition he came, he said, to realise the devastating effect it had on his people, and to understand for the first time the sense of loss and grief of family members who had been directly affected.⁸

No doubt in the writings of sociologists too we will find articulations of the contribution of both personal and corporate recordkeeping to preserving society's memory, experiential knowledge and cultural identity. Anthony Giddens, for example, explores these dimensions with regard to recorded information as an authoritative resource. Within the broader framework he provides, it is possible to pinpoint the particular role of archival documents in the transfer of culture.⁹

Killing the memory

Recent events in Bosnia-Herzegovina have provided us with a devastating example of how fundamental is the warrant to keep both personal and corporate records and other documents as evidence of cultural identity, so fundamentally significant that libraries and archives were deliberately targeted in the bombing. This is how one writer interpreted the deliberate destruction of the holdings of institutions like the National Library and University of Sarajevo:

Libraries, archives, museums and cultural institutions throughout Bosnia have been targeted for destruction, in an attempt to eliminate any material evidence — books, documents and works of art — that could remind future generations that people of different ethnic and religious traditions once shared a common heritage in Bosnia. The practitioners of ethnic 'cleansing' are not content to terrorise and kill the living; they want to eliminate all memory of the past as well. ('Killing the memory: The targeting of libraries and archives in Bosnia-

Herzegovina' by Andras Riedlmayer,
*Newsletter of the Middle East Librarians
 Association*, No 61, Autumn 1994, p1-6.)

Riedlmayer refers also to the burning of communal records, cadastral registers, documents of religious endowments, and parish records of the Muslim and Bosnian Croat (Catholic) communities.

This is but a recent example of a recurring pattern in human history. On one level such actions are aimed at insuring the victors against future claims by the peoples they hope to dispossess. At a more profound level, destroy the memory — the evidence that those peoples ever lived in that place — and those peoples, those cultures *never existed at all*.

Preserving the memory

Although it is possible to draw parallels between the ways that archivists might analyse and explain personal and corporate recordkeeping, it is not so easy to identify a role for archivists in personal recordkeeping that parallels the role they are taking on in developing and implementing post custodial strategies for corporate recordkeeping. While it is possible to think of some ways in which archivists can connect in to the capture of personal records, and modify personal recordkeeping behaviour, it is difficult to see how they could play the sort of proactive, interventionist part posited for them in corporate recordkeeping. Perhaps what is much more likely to occur is that individual recordkeeping behaviour will be influenced by developments in the corporate and networked world. Recordkeeping patterns and processes acquired in the work 'place' will cross over into personal recordkeeping behaviours. New documentary forms and recordkeeping systems, limited and enabled by information and communication

technology, but driven by business and social needs, will become institutionalised in our society and in our various capacities we will adopt new recordkeeping behaviours. In corporate settings the direct role of archivists in such developments is more significant, though it is still facilitative rather than instrumental.

The Pittsburgh Project has defined the functional requirements for corporate recordkeeping and specified how to establish recordkeeping systems and processes that can capture, manage and deliver complete, accurate and useable records of significant business activities and maintain them through time for as long as they are needed for business, legal and accountability purposes. It has posited post custodial strategies that are about 'steering' not 'rowing' — developing policies, designing systems, developing implementation tactics and managing compliance with standards. It has explored whether software applications can meet some or all of the functional requirements for corporate recordkeeping, how the recordkeeping functional requirements might be brought into play in the development of standards, especially those relating to business acceptable communications, and what features of corporate culture might affect the success of recordkeeping strategies. The project has also explored the 'literary warrant' for corporate recordkeeping with reference to the compliance regime of the organisation as referenced in law, standards and best practices.

Although the Pittsburgh Project was concerned with the formation of the corporate archive, its brief did not extend to issues associated with the collective archives of society, issues of social memory and cultural identity, nor did it consider personal recordkeeping. It may well be that, as Chris Hurley said to the ASA's

Collecting Archivists SIG in Canberra in July 1995:

...there is a whole other process of re-invention to be undertaken — a parallel Pittsburgh Project if you like — to identify and articulate the functional requirements for personal recordkeeping and for socio-historical evidence.

We also need to discover the broader 'literary warrant' for these functional requirements.

Adrian Cunningham has suggested a number of strategies for archival intervention in personal recordkeeping in an electronic environment, including encouraging authors and scholars to make hard copies of successive drafts of works in progress, pre-custodial intervention (involving building partnerships with potential donors to influence their recordkeeping practices), and the development by collecting archives of an agreed standard for record format and storage medium for the deposit of electronic records.¹⁰ Others have suggested consideration of how the software applications designed specifically for personal use — and by extension for the use of clubs, associations and small business — might satisfy personal recordkeeping requirements. It might also be useful to consider building partnerships with people and organisations that interact with potential donors and may be able to modify their recordkeeping behaviour, for example with editors and publishers in the case of writers. However on the whole, as discussed above, we may just have to accept that archivists cannot play much of a direct role in these process-based aspects of personal recordkeeping in an electronic environment any more than they could in the paper environment.

What archivists can do is to further develop and share their understandings

of the role of personal recordkeeping in our society and the 'place' of the personal archive in the collective archives. It may be that studying the personal archive in the way suggested in this article will provide us with insights that enable us to understand recordkeeping per se as a social system, a perspective that is often missing in studies of corporate recordkeeping.

We could envision that a research brief might include investigation of how recordkeeping processes and systems become institutionalised in our society so that, in their personal recordkeeping, individuals come to apply the 'rules' relating to documentary form and recordkeeping systems implicitly (in much the same way as they apply the 'rules' of grammar when they speak and write). Document creation and recordkeeping processes in a paper environment have been institutionalised in our society to the extent that for many individuals they have become a matter of routine. This process of institutionalisation is yet to occur in relation to electronic recordkeeping — and so for individuals to be able to function in that environment, it is necessary for the application of the 'rules' that sit behind the processes to be made explicit. Although archivists are beginning to see how this can be achieved in a corporate environment, it may not be feasible in relation to personal recordkeeping. In the interregnum before electronic document creation and recordkeeping processes become routine, personal recordkeeping may be at particular risk. Other aspects of the brief might include consideration of why people want or need to make, keep and destroy personal records and the mandates for personal recordkeeping. Research could be conducted on the personality traits of people who are good recordkeepers, who are

moved to make and keep records in such a way that they come to form a personal archive. The factors which influence recordkeeping behaviour in any context are numerous. Some of those factors, including personality, may well play a part in shaping the recordkeeping behaviour of individuals in the corporate environment as well as in the personal domain. The 'literary warrant' for personal recordkeeping and for socio-historical evidence could also be investigated. Finally there is a pressing need to explore the functional requirements for post-custodial archival regimes that can ensure that a personal archive of value to society becomes an accessible part of the collective memory.

Acknowledgement

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of my colleague Frank Upward in commenting on this article in draft form and in providing a key reference point for the article in his model of the records continuum. For a first articulation of this model, see his unpublished October 1995 paper, 'Our places, these kingdoms', presented at the *Archives as place* seminar, which also featured papers by Luciana Duranti and Glenda Acland.

I also thank Michael Piggott for his encouragement and support, and for our shared interest in what Michael refers to as the human element in recordkeeping.

Endnotes

1. According to Wendy Duff the term 'literary warrant' was first coined by E Wyndham Hulme who believed that the literature of a subject should provide the justification for establishing classes in library classification systems (see RK Olding, *Reading in library cataloguing*, FW Cheshire, Melbourne, 1966, pp105-6). For the latest report on

the Pittsburgh Project, see Richard Cox (ed), *University of Pittsburgh Recordkeeping Functional Requirements Project: Reports and Working Papers — Progress Report Two*, SILS, University of Pittsburgh, March 1995.

2. Tolstoy, of course, went even further when referring to his diaries: 'The diaries are me'. (See *Tolstoy's diaries*, edited and translated by RF Christian, Flamingo, 1995.) I am grateful to Michael Piggott for drawing this quotation to my attention.
3. Neil Davis shot the famous film of the North Vietnamese tank crashing through the gates of the American Embassy in what is now Ho Chi Minh city. He filmed a decade of war in Indochina, only to die some time later filming a minor skirmish in Thailand, the film eerily capturing the moment of his death as the camera falls from his hands and the picture wavers and pans to the ground.
4. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and self-identity: self and society in the late modern age*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991. I am grateful to Frank Upward for drawing this reference to my attention.
5. An interesting sidelight on White's views on destroying letters and other personal records is perhaps provided by his experience as an RAF intelligence officer assigned to squadrons in the Middle East during World War II when his duties included censoring the letters home of other members of his unit — 'between men and women who, it seemed, would never be together again'. White drew on this experience in writing *Voss* — 'the long-distance affair of Voss and Laura grew out of these censored letters'. (*Patrick White: a life*,

p 226.) White was particularly disturbed about the way Katherine Mansfield's letters and notebooks had 'lingered on to accuse her'. However while stating that he preferred 'to remember her by her stories', he also confessed to being 'tremendously intrigued by the private sometimes automatic outpourings'. (In a letter to Marshall Best at Viking, quoted in *Patrick White: a life*, p376.) White's destructive behaviour in relation to letters, diaries and manuscripts did not extend to photographs:

Though he threw out all the letters and most of the documents that came his way, White kept photographs. Boxes of them.

(See David Marr's review of William Yang's photographs of White, *Patrick White: the late years* (Pan Macmillan, 1995), "Balzac" reveals secret faces of Patrick White'. Again I am grateful to Michael Piggott for this reference.

6. The term comes from a review by Harry Gordon of McCullin's *Sleeping with ghosts: a life's work in photography*, Vintage, 1996: 'A haunted witness', *The Age Saturday Extra*, 3 Feb 1996.

7. Some might dispute whether personal diaries and other facilitative and reflective personal records, for example unsent letters, notes to ourselves, and earlier versions of documents in accumulations of personal records, are records. Do they fit definitions of records which focus on their attributes as communicated transactions, captured and maintained in context, and kept as evidence of the related social or business activity for as long as they are of continuing value? Are personal diaries communications? Do they capture transactions in the context of the related social or business context? Are

they maintained through time as evidence of that activity? The answer would seem to be potentially yes. Some would argue that personal diaries are communications/transactions with the self. This sense of the diary as a communicated transaction is caught by biographer Brenda Niall in a review of Judy Cassab's *Diaries* (Knopf, 1995):

A diary is the most private form of writing. Autobiographies go out to the world; letters are one-to-one transactions, but in the diary the self speaks to the self alone. ('Painting a life on pages of a diary', *The Sunday Age, Agenda*, 7 Jan 1996.)

Of course diaries range from these very private communications with the self to those commissioned for publication. (Michael Piggott cites as an interesting example of this genre *Steve Waugh's West Indian Tour Diary*.) There is a more fundamental sense in which any diary qualifies as a communication — the socially conditioned processes involved in keeping a diary mean that it is potentially communicable, regardless of whether the writer ever intends to communicate its contents to others or not. The writer's intention not to communicate it to others or the fact that for the time being it might have been deliberately made 'inaccessible' by being locked away from curious eyes are irrelevant to the diary's status as a record. The critical factors in determining its recordness are whether:

- it has been rendered into a documentary form that is potentially accessible to other human beings
- it has been captured in a recordkeeping system in the context of a social or business activity
- it is kept in a way that enables it to continue to function as evidence of that activity.

Whether primarily facilitative or reflective, for those who keep them diaries often play an instrumental role in the social and business processes associated with their day-to-day activities, their social and business roles, and relationships with other people. Perhaps most significantly they can also evidence the way in which we 'place' ourselves in relation to others. The key to the diary's potential quality of recordness lies in whether it has been captured by processes that fix it in time and space, link it to its transactional context (that is the context of a business or social activity associated with an individual's particular functions and roles in society), and carry it forward in context through time, thus making it 'traceable' in space and over time. Its transactional and evidential nature, the distinguishing characteristics of archival documents, can be determined according to these criteria. Biographers, historiographers and others have of course studied diaries from their own particular perspectives.

8. At the time of writing the national government has just launched an inquiry into Australia's 'stolen children', those whose official files bear witness to the institutionalised racism that underpinned the government's policy in casual annotations such as 'will pass as European; black hair, dark skin, but otherwise quite appealing' (*but otherwise* — simple words made brutal by their context).
9. As explored by Frank Upward, 'Institutionalising the archival document: some theoretical perspectives on Terry Eastwood's challenge', in Sue McKemmish and Frank Upward, *Archival documents: providing accountability through recordkeeping*, Ancora Press, Clayton, 1993, pp 41–54.
10. See his article 'The archival management of personal records in electronic form: some suggestions', *Archives and Manuscripts*, Vol 22, N° 1, May 1994, pp 94–105.